

2009 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Last November, I drafted a State of the City Address. This is not that speech. Since then, our community has experienced events that are extraordinary and horrific. When events of this magnitude happen, we first react as best we can. Then, when we have a little time to step back and think, we realize our perspective on our world and our lives has changed.

During the first few days when Chief Scott Russell was struggling for survival, I spent my share of time thinking of his accomplishments as a law-enforcement professional, his many years of service to our city, and his invaluable presence during our months without a full-time city administrator. I spent more time thinking of his enormous intelligence, his wide-ranging interests, his fundamental decency, and his smile. On the Saturday morning when I learned that the Chief was recovering consciousness, I went to OHSU Hospital in the hope that I could express some of those thoughts to him face to face. I was able to do so – and to see that smile. It was an enormous blessing to say some words I could have found myself saying at a memorial to a living friend. Please, when there are such words you want to say to someone, be they nearest and dearest, good friend, or person you would miss if they were no longer part of your life: say them!

So, there are some words I have for you today. As always, it is a pleasure and a privilege to give this address as Mayor of the City of Woodburn. I have started six previous State of the City addresses with very much the same words, but there are a few more I would like to add this year. I want to say how much I value each and every one of you in this room and those of you watching this address on television or on line. Many of you are longtime friends, and many others of you are people I did not know well before December's events but have since come to admire and appreciate. Woodburn is home to some of the finest people on this Earth. I am blessed to live among you and to be of service to you.

2008 is not a year that most of us will remember in a good way. Even without December's tragedy, we have been touched by war, dissension and a faltering economy, both locally and globally. Things have frequently been frustrating, occasionally infuriating, and sometimes downright scary. But we have also made strides in many areas in the past year. We are a better community in many ways, both large and small. We are prepared to take some positive steps ahead in this new year and beyond.

In 2008 we made some major changes to our City management team. Terrie Stevens joined us as Assistant City Administrator at the beginning of last year. She has spent much of her first year with us involved with personnel issues and labor negotiations, but you can expect to see much more of her in the months and years to come. She is a top-drawer professional with a great deal to offer our

community. Dan Brown joined us as Public Works Director a month later. If I were asked to describe Dan in a word or two, those words would be “integrity” and “professionalism”. His department will accomplish some exceptional things under his leadership in the coming months and years.

Of course, we had a remarkable 7 months of Scott Russell’s leadership, as he doubled as Police Chief and Interim City Administrator. When John Brown left us for Petaluma, it was apparent to me that we had some challenges to face as a community while we looked for a permanent replacement, that were better addressed by a long-time City department head than by an outsider. I am certain that the Chief would have been happier without the additional aggravation. The job brought challenges that I know neither he nor the elected body fully anticipated, but he handled them ably.

As we began our recruitment for a permanent City Administrator, we were warned that, with the aging of the baby boom and changes in people’s chosen career paths, we might find ourselves with a very small applicant pool. What we found, instead, was a pool of qualified semifinalists that was at least as large as the qualified applicants from our previous recruitments. From those, we chose to interview five outstanding candidates, any one of whom would have done a good job for us. After three interview panels and the general public had their shot at them, we chose two finalists and subjected them both to exhaustive background checks. When we hired Scott Derickson, it was with the certainty that he is a good person who is a great fit for our community.

On the evening of December 12, after the phone call that no one would ever want to receive, I went to the Woodburn Police Facility. One of the first people I saw there was Dan Brown, who was at the reception desk helping to manage the flow of officers from other agencies who were arriving to lend their support. Terrie Stevens and Scott Derickson were there as well. They and our long-time City Attorney, Bob Shields, were with me on the ride to the hospital that night, through that long night, and all through a following day that I will never forget. In the following weeks, Terrie and Dan performed stellar work as part of the team planning Tom Tennant’s memorial. Scott brought his leadership talents to keeping the city functioning and helping to sustain the spirit of the City as an organization. Even today, and probably for many more months, they will be dealing with the fallout from December’s events, as well as the daily challenges of city operations. All of these people are very good at what they do professionally, and they are also very good people. The Woodburn community is very lucky to have all of them working for us.

Monday night, Mary Tennant asked me to read a thank you letter from her family, which some of you may have also seen in the *Woodburn Independent*. I will quote one sentence directly: “Please join us by continuing to honor our Tom by picking up the baton and volunteering your time and talents to continue to improve the community Tom loved and put his life on the line every day to

protect.” In times like these – and even in very good times – the reality is that limited budgets mean that some very important needs must be met through other means. I am asking for your help in meeting one need today. We have finished the paper work for what we are calling, for now, the Woodburn Foundation. We only need a complete board to allow it to get off the ground and begin its work. Our intention is to have it as a tool to allow valuable programs and projects to come to be even if city, state or federal funds are not available to pay for them. If this is a project you think you would like to be a part of, I would like your name and contact information. Our community needs your efforts and your talents in this area, and in many others. We need each other to make our way in this world.

I cannot talk about the management team that emerged in 2008 without mentioning a couple of other exceptional individuals. Charlie Blevins came to us a number of years ago from the City of Lake Oswego. As a police captain, he has always shown himself to be a complete professional, and a great guy to get to know. He became Acting Chief the night of the bombing, and has since been a source of strength to the Woodburn Police Department and to the city as a whole. Charlie Blevins is an amazing individual. He deserves all of your thanks, and all of your support.

Finally, our most recent management recruit may be one of the most significant in the months and years ahead. Jim Hendryx started as our Community Development Director on December 15. As you might imagine, he did not receive the soft entry and attentive start on the job that he might have under other circumstances. To his enormous credit, he has taken the initiative to look closely at the big picture issues in land use, ordinances, staffing and customer service that have affected his department in recent years. He has already begun a process of community outreach that we hope will lead to lasting and positive changes in how we do business with the public. I think those of you who heard Jim give an initial presentation to the Woodburn City Council on January 12 were impressed. Those who haven't had the chance to meet him in action yet will be.

I think the people I have just spoken of are outstanding additions to our city's management team. I would be remiss if I did not also mention our city's policy-making body, the Woodburn City Council. We had a more interesting than usual election season this year, and the actual ballot counts reflected some mixed results. I appreciate the support I received in my race against Cliff Zauner, who is a well-known and public-spirited man by anyone's standards. I also appreciate his gracious attitude and the generosity of many of his supporters since the election. After the ballots are counted, it's time to get back to work at the many things involved in making our community a better place to be. I like to think that's the American way, and I'm glad it's the Woodburn way. I have had the chance to get to know Councilors Berkey, Schmidt and Pugh better in recent weeks, and admire and respect all of them. I believe that they, Councilors McCallum, Lonergan and Cox, and I will work well together. The Woodburn City Council has

a tradition of working together professionally and with an eye toward the best interests of this community. I am certain that tradition will not change on my watch.

The State of the City address always falls at a time of year that guarantees that it will contain both “last year in review” subject matter and some looks at what we hope to accomplish in the upcoming year. So let’s spend some time on the future.

This year, more than the usual number of things that have been works in progress will be completed – or, at least move to a different stage in their progress. February 5 will be a great day for our city: Woodburn Rotary and our city crews will install the gazebo in the Woodburn Downtown Plaza, and the Plaza will be complete. Thank you Rotary, thank you to the many other individuals and businesses that have made donations to make this possible, and thank you to Jim Row, our Community Services Director, for reimagining this project in a way that finally allowed it to reach completion. By the way, Jim’s success at this endeavor will earn him a reward: I have asked him to look at ways to finish Centennial Park as well.

While you are downtown admiring the Plaza, you will notice a lot of cones, paint lines, and construction materials. Yes, the downtown and North Front Street projects are really under way. What you see today is the undergrounding of the overhead lines. What you will see in the coming months are reconstructed sidewalks in the downtown area and a reconstructed and widened street in the area between downtown and the high school. This has not been an easy project to design, build or pay for. Former City Administrator John Brown and Public Works Director Dan Brown deserve a great deal of credit for making it possible. We are going to be very proud of this project when it is done.

The Front Street project is the end of the beginning of our Urban Renewal Plan. I am sometimes asked why the Urban Renewal Plan has not shown more results than it has so far. That is because it is funded by increases in property taxes gained from the property that is within the Urban Renewal District. That means that there is a limited amount of money for the first few years of the district, and an increasingly greater amount of money to put to work for future years. At the January 12 Council meeting, I appointed a task force of individuals with a proven interest in bettering our downtown to work with our Community Development staff and our consultant to set some goals and some ways of realizing them for the next stage of our Urban Renewal program. There will be ample opportunities for all of you with an interest in the project to take part as well. Our changes in department staffing and in obtaining a different consultant have slowed this long-awaited process down, but it is now ready to move ahead at full speed. When we have made some more specific decisions about what our next steps for downtown are, we will be able to fund them and bring them to fruition.

Now, let's talk about the two projects that I have spoken of in every State of the City address: the Woodburn interchange and the Urban Growth Boundary expansion. Last fall, our engineering and planning staffs, Commissioner Brentano and I met with ODOT staff to see, among other things, if the Woodburn interchange could qualify as a "shovel-ready" project. Frankly, I was disappointed at the difference between its design status as it had previously been represented to me and reality. However, having a realistic view is the first step toward identifying what we need to do to break ground. We are prepared to do whatever it takes through the legislative process at every level of government to shake loose the money to finish the design and get the project done.

As to the Urban Growth Boundary expansion, this is a project that has been underway for ten years and counting. That is an unacceptably long time, and that is another issue that we intend to take up with our legislative delegation in the upcoming months. At this point, our expansion has been approved by the Woodburn Planning Commission, the Woodburn City Council, the Marion County Commission, and the Land Conservation and Development Commission. It has been tied up in court by a special interest group appeal for over a year. We are hoping for a court date for oral argument soon, and hope that approval by several citizen bodies will lead to a favorable outcome. When that happens, we need to be ready to act on development applications that will, even in today's economic climate, happen almost immediately. It will be an exciting time, and one that will require a great deal of energy on all of our parts.

I did refer to today's economic climate. We are faced with the realities of slower tax collections, uncertainty over state funding sources, and increased demand for some services as our citizens endure difficult economic times. We have already done our best to keep professionals we will need on our staff when our industrial land emerges from court employed doing projects we would have otherwise contracted out for. We will probably need to do more to avoid deficits and maintain services in the months ahead. We will do so without sacrificing long range fiscal responsibility to spare short-term pain. As December showed, economic crises happen, tragedies happen, and bad weather happens. We need to maintain the ability to pay for them.

Woodburn, like every community, gets its share of attention for things that go wrong. Over the years, we have also been noticed for things that we have done well. We have been singled out for projects as diverse as the Weed and Seed program and the Big Read not only because of our needs, but because of our ability to put our arms around the programs and make them work. It is gratifying to be visited by Latin American law enforcement officials who are learning about Woodburn's police practices, Russian and Canadian engineers studying our wastewater poplar plantation, and Romanian mayors looking at decent low-income housing. We are studied and copied by other communities because of our successes in living together as a diverse community.

In December, we received attention as the location of a horrible tragedy. We responded with grace and courage. It has been noticed around the world. My challenge to you today is to continue to be a great example of a community, not only to ourselves, but to our nation, state and planet. We are too busy to doubt, fear or hate: we have more important things to attend to. We are here to build our community and love our families and friends. We are here to build our castles in the air, and to build the foundations under them that turn those castles into reality.

I enjoyed and appreciated the quotations that Deb Yager shared with us in her message to the Chamber as outgoing President. With that inspiration, I will share another quote with you. Most January firsts, like most of you, I make some sort of resolution that involves trying to be good. This year, I am replacing that resolution with these words from Eckhart Tolle: "You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge." This year, I plan to find that goodness within me – and around me and above me – and allow that goodness to emerge. If we all do that as individuals, some wonderful things will happen. If we do this as a community, we surely will be a shining example to the rest of our world.